

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 3253

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH

SUBJ: DEMOCRAT PARTY CONVENTION

REF: A. FBIS BANGKOK D250419Z FEB 74

B. BANGKOK 2530

C. FBIS BANGKOK D250432Z FEB 74

D. FBIS BANGKOK D250423Z FEB 74

SUMMARY: THE DEMOCRAT PARTY HELD ITS PARTY CONVENTION ON 24 FEBRUARY AND CONFIRMED SENI PRAMOJ AS PARTY LEADER. THE DEMOCRATS APPARENTLY QUIETLY PRUGED DISSIDENT ELEMENTS AND WROTE A LIBERAL PARTY PLATFORM. SUSPENDED SINCE THE ABOLITION OF PARLIAMENT IN NOVEMBER 1971, THE DEMOCRAT PARTY STILL APPEARS RESPONSIVE TO SENI'S WISHES. END SUMMARY.

1. SENI PRAMOJ WAS UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED LEADER OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY ON 24 FEBRUARY 1974. SENI ACKNOWLEDGED HIS AGE TO THE CONVENTION, BUT ADDED, "I CAN STILL KICK THE BUCKET AND MAKE A LOT OF NOISE." (REF A). (COMMENT: THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION SAYS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS CABINET MUST BE PARLIAMENTARIANS. ALTHOUGH SENI THUS BECOMES APROSPECTIVE PRIME MINISTER, THERE IS NO CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENT THAT HE AUTOMATICALLY INHERITS THE JOB IF HIS PARTY SHOULD EMERGE IN A DOMINANT POSITION.)

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2. ACCORDING TO THE "BANGKOK POST" SEVERAL FORMER DEMOCRAT MPS ARE NO LONGER WITH THE PARTY. PERHAPS THE MOST RECENTLY "PUBLIC" OF THESE IS MR. CHUAN KITTISRIVORAPHAN, FORMER MP FROM NAKHON PHANOM. HE FOCUSED PUBLIC ATTENTION ON THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE BURNING AND LOOTING OF BAN NA SAI. THIS INCIDENT HAS NOW BECOME THAILAND'S "MINI MY LAI". CHUAN, A DEMOCRAT PARTY WHIP IN 1969, HAS DRIFTED AWAY FROM THE PARTY IN RECENT YEARS. HIS ABSENCE DOES NOT INDICATE A PARTY SPLIT OR PURGE. THE LEADER OF THE "OLD GUARD" THANGAI SUWANNETHAK (REF B) HAS LEFT THE THE PARTY AND FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL YAI SAWITCHART WAS CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT FROM THE CONVENTION. FRIENDS SAY HE WAS IN CHIANG MAI ON BUSINESS. HE REMAINS A PARTY MEMBER, BUT NO LONGER SECRETARY GENERAL. "THE NATION" ON FEBRUARY 25 REPORTS THAT THANGAI HAS CALLED A MEETING OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY ON MARCH 8. SPECULATION CONTINUES THAT THANGAI WILL LAUNCH ANOTHER PARTY ALSO CALLING ITSELF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY. THE PRESS CLAIMS THAT SENI SAID THANGAI CAN USE THE NAME UNTIL THE POLITICAL PARTY ACT IS PROCLAIMED. IF THANGAI PERSISTS, DISAGREEMENT OVER WHO WILL CARRY THE DEMOCRAT PARTY LABEL IS POSSIBLE. THE RECENT CONVENTION THUS MAY NOT HAVE HEALED ALL WOUNDS.

3. QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DEMOCRAT PARTY'S CAPABILITY TO FORM A GOVERNMENT CONTINUE TO PLAGUE THE PERENNIAL PARTY. IN AN EDITORIAL (REF C) ENTITLED, "DEMOCRATS SHOW THE WAY" THE "POST" SAYS "THE PRACHATIPATAI (DEMOCRAT) PARTY ... HAS SHOWN THE WAY TO OTHER POLITICAL GROUPS, THE WAY TO ORGANIZE THEMSELVES, THE WAY TO DO IT ALL DEMOCRATICALLY. THIS IS IMPORTANT: IF WE ARE GOING TO BUILD A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY WE MUST BEGIN WITH THE POLITICAL PARTY." THE EDITORIAL GOES ON TO OUTLINE THE DEMOCRATS' ADVANTAGES AS THE OLDEST PARTY IN EXISTENCE WITH A DISTINGUISHED REPUTATION AND A NATIONWIDE MEMBERSHIP. BUT IT POINTS OUT THAT THE DEMOCRATS HAVE ALMOST ALWAYS BEEN AN OPPOSITION GROUP EXPOSING THE MISDEEDS OF PAST GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR LEADERS. "NOW THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS NON-PARTISAN AND THE PRIME MINISTER IS DEFINITELY NOT SEEKING POLITICAL OFFICE, THE DEMOCRATS WILL BE HARD

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PUT TO TRY AND WIN VOTES THROUGH MERE OPPOSITION. THEY HAVE TO PRESENT POSITIVE PROGRAMS TO THE PUBLIC TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF OUR TIME."

4. THE DEMOCRAT PARTY'S POLICY STATEMENT (REF D) ALLUDES TO NEW DIRECTIONS IN PARTY POLICIES. THE PARTY WILL ALSO CALL FOR LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT WITH DECENTRALIZATION OF AUTHORITY AND BUDGETS TO LOCAL ADMINISTRATIONS. THE

DEMOCRATS PROPOSE A "LAND TO THE TILLERS" PROGRAM AND PLEDGE TO HELP FARMERS WITH IRRIGATION, FERTILIZER, AND SETTLEMENT OF THEIR DEBTS. SENI DESCRIBES THE PARTY'S SECONOMIC POLICY AS "MILD SOCIALISM". IN FOREIGN POLICY THE DEMOCRATS WILL PROMOTE FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH ALL COUNTRIES WHICH DO NOT ENDANGER THAI NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY OR INDEPDENDENCE.

5. SOME DEMOCRAT PARTY PROVINCIAL LEADERS HAVE ALREADY ATTACKED THIS POLICY STATEMENT, HOWEVER, AS BEING TOO VAGUE AND DATED. ACCORDING TO THE "POST" SOME LEADERS SUGGEST THAT THE POLICY SHOUD TAKE A COMPROMISE LINE WITH THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THAILAND AND ABOLISH PRE-SENT ANTI-COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES. ANOTHER BRANCH LEADER SUGGESTED A SPECIFIC STAND BE TAKEN OPPOSING FOREIGN TROOPS STATIONED IN THE COUNTRY AS THEY COMPROMISE THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE ADMINISTRATION. (COMMENT: THERE WAS SOME GRUMBLING AMONG NON-EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE DELEGATES THAT THEY COULD NOT TAKE THE FLOOR DURING THE CONVENTION. AN EMBASSY OBSERVER NOTED THAT THE CONVENTION CHAIRMAN KEPT TIGHT, IF NOT DICTATORIAL, REIN ON THE DEBATE. SUCH TIGHT CONTROLS COULD BE AN ADMISSION OF A LACK OF UNITY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER INFIGHTING ONCE THE PARTY'S SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES TAKE THEIR SEATS IN PARLIAMENT.

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